

SEPTEMBER 17, 1981

Guests at the ranch are taken on the same tour regardless of their interests. It doesn't matter whether the tourists are costume designers or anthropologists, I always take them to the old Indian camp grounds and down by the fossil outcrops left by the ancient seas. The only exception is that for northern folks I add more Spanish to cover my deficiency in English. Other hombres just hear my drawl broken by bits of wet Mexican lingo.

Last week, one of my cousins and my brother brought out a journalist from New York that took extra preparation. He'd spent too much time among the con men in the big town to be an easy mark. Besides his street qualifications, his great grandfather had served a tour of duty at the old fort in San Angelo way back in the Indian days.

So I realized that in case his old grandpa had happened to leave some letters, I'd better not try any "bury me not on the lone prairie" acts on this guy. As you have probably observed, writers get as good at detecting lies as they do at telling them. It would've been pretty easy for a few letters to remain hidden in an old trunk up North exposing how my clan tried to homestead every piece of land around, including the parade ground at the fort in town. Too, I'd been tipped off that he could read; my brother had told me he was a graduate of Harvard University.

The best way to explain the technique I used on this New York fellow is to tell you that I directed everything toward his great grandfather's times. After I was sure that the old man had left a sword instead of a bunch of blabbermouth correspondence, I laid it on plenty thick how grateful we were that the bluecoats and the black soldiers had driven the bloodthirsty Injuns from our lands. About how every time we heard taps played on the radio when I was a kid, we thought of the brave Yankee officers leading their troops after the redskins.

I didn't dare mention that my wife was a descendant of those redskins we were so dramatically chasing across the dinner table. I knew she wasn't so grateful for the liberation of the land. However, Child Who Sits in the Sun has mellowed through the years. She no longer paints up on Columbus Day and Thanksgiving like she did in the early part of our marriage. Just last week, she quoted the Great White Father without tearing up my newspaper and making an awful scene. I think in 40 more years she'll forgive me for the past.

After the fourth campground, things relaxed and the New Yorker admitted that he wasn't going to write about anything except the mesquite trees and the people out here. He swore he wasn't going to get off on the sticky matters such as the E.P.A. trying to ban everything we use to protect ourselves, from fly swatters and mouse traps to branding irons and pen knives.

I couldn't forget the ease with which other out of state scribes used to malign coyote control. I actually trusted this fellow, but since 75 percent of the programs on modern ranch operations need to be kept confidential and the rest is better left unsaid, I suggested we go back to the ranch house before the rattlesnakes started moving out of their dens.

We spent the rest of the visit discussing a new slick magazine published in Houston, and other odds and ends of his trade. We avoided such topics as the

reconstructionists and the carpet bagging days of long ago. I did suggest that when he had an assignment below the Mason Dixon line, he might want to carry his gear in a smaller bag. Prudence, you know, is a good idea on foreign duty. I didn't want some hombre knocking off a guy that could be a good friend in the end.

It's hard to police up before visitors come. The men I work with are well schooled. Mesquite and the Shortgrass Country make a good subject for the East. I do hope he prints my story about the 7.5 foot rattlesnake that was so mean he lived in an ant bed.